

SUMMARY OF TESTIMONY OF JONATHAN S. ADELSTEIN
COMMISSIONER, FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
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Mr. Chairman, Congressman Upton, and members of the Subcommittee, no issue on our agenda has greater consequences for our society than the future of our media. We have heard a bipartisan chorus of opposition to further media consolidation as we travel the country. Americans from all political perspectives, whether right, left and virtually everyone in between, do not want a handful of companies dominating their primary sources of news and information. Yet, the Commission has set off on a sprint along a dangerous course that could harm the American media for future generations.

We are not proceeding with due deference to the American public and their elected representatives. For example, our recent hearing in Seattle, Washington was announced with the minimum notice allowed by law, five business days, despite the express request of the members of the Washington delegation. People poured out anyway to voice their opposition to media consolidation. The next day back in the office, the Chairman announced plans in an op-ed how to relax the cross ownership rule. It is hard to imagine how it was possible to review hundreds of public comments before issuing the proposal the next working day, and it is an ominous sign for those hoping their comments on the current proposal will be considered in the decision-making process.

The proposal, though portrayed as “modest,” affecting only the top twenty markets, would actually open the door to newspapers buying up broadcast outlets in every market in America. The waiver standards are so loose combinations could be allowed in any city, no matter how small, and for any TV station, no matter how dominant. This ignores evidence that in communities with cross-owned stations, the overall level of local news is diminished. We should study this before proceeding.

We need to reassess our priorities. We should first implement improvements to localism and diversity of ownership before – not after – we address the media ownership rules. We should create an independent, bipartisan panel to guide us on a course to implement improvements in the level of ownership of media outlets by women and minorities. To restore an open and transparent process, the Commission should voluntarily follow a course along the lines laid out in the bipartisan bill S. 2332 – the Media Ownership Act of 2007.

It is also critical that the FCC show far greater leadership on the DTV transition. We need a national DTV outreach, education and implementation plan that coordinates the efforts and messages of all stakeholders. We should create a DTV Transition Task force to coordinate Federal efforts and work with private sector partners. We should establish a single national DTV call center and hotline. We need to plan for and launch a targeted grassroots information and technical assistance campaign. And we need to establish much needed guidance for broadcasters soon. We have lost valuable time focusing on more tangential aspects of the transition while not moving forward on clarifying urgent demands on broadcasters to get a huge job done in short order.

As GAO has noted, there is nobody in charge of the transition and there is no plan. We still have time to turn this around, but only if we increase the level of leadership, coordination and resources dedicated to this undertaking. The ongoing leadership of this subcommittee has been and will continue to be extremely helpful in focusing our efforts. I look forward to working with you to ensure that American media remains the most vibrant in the world.